



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **ICE AGENTS AND THAI POLICE NAB SMUGGLER SELLING 165-MILLION YEAR-OLD DINOSAUR FOSSILS WORLDWIDE VIA THE INTERNET**

*More than 1,300 pounds of dinosaur bones seized*

**BANGKOK** – The Royal Thai Police (RTP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today announced the culmination of an 8-month investigation into the illegal possession, sale and exportation of more than 1,300 pounds of priceless fossils and Thai and Khmer cultural antiquities.

On July 16 the ICE Attaché in Bangkok, one of 55 overseas ICE offices, received information that a Thai national identified as Piriya Vachajitpan was selling Thai and Cambodian antiquities via on-line auction and illegally shipping the artifacts to the United States in violation of 18 U.S.C. 545, 19 U.S.C. 2606 and Thai law as outlined under Article 22 of the Fine Arts Act.

“These fossils are part of Thailand’s historical record and are not for sale to the highest bidder,” said Michael J. Garcia, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. “Anybody possessing these items in the United States needs to do the right thing and call 1-866-DHS-2ICE and arrange for the artifacts to be returned.”

ICE agents, working closely with the RTP, maintained undercover contact with Vachajitpan and discussed the purchase of indigenous fossils from Thailand, as well as Buddha images from both Thailand and Cambodia.

On Monday, undercover ICE and RTP agents met with Vachajitpan to purchase indigenous fossils from Thailand and Burma. During the undercover negotiations, Vachajitpan led agents to his vehicle where the fossils were boxed and packaged.

An undercover agent examined the fossils for authenticity and discovered that all of the fossils appeared to be genuine, some dating back to the Cretaceous period (approximately 145-165 million years ago).

During the examination of the fossils, the RTP placed Vachajitpan under arrest for attempting to sell and export Thai artifacts in violation of Article 22. Vachajitpan was escorted back to RTP Headquarters and the fossils were transported and examined by a Paleontologist that authenticated all of the fossils.

Based on the authenticity of the fossils the RTP executed a search warrant at Vachajitpan’s residence. A search of the residence and property resulted in the discovery of approximately 500-600 kilograms (1100-1320 lbs) of fossils.

All of the fossils were seized pursuant to Thai law.

The fossils are believed by scientist to derive from the Jurassic and Cretaceous period and include bones from suopod, stegosaur, mastodon and theropods.

Since 1998 Vachajitpan shipped several thousand pieces to the United States, mainly to individuals and small antique shops. Investigation continues for the recovery of the previously shipped items.

### **#ICE #**

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*